

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 OES-07 COME-00 STR-07

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R 192300Z APR 78

FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 559

INFO AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USMISSION GENEVA

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 3 SEOUL 3223

HONG KONG FOR REGFINATT; GENEVA FOR USDEL MTN

E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: KOREAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES MAJOR PROGRAM OF IMPORT
LIBERALIZATION, 1978-82.

REF: SEOUL 1529

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED: SUMMARY: ON APRIL 15, 1978, THE KOREAN
GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED A PROGRAM OF IMPORT LIBERALIZATION TO
TAKE PLACE IN SUCCESSIVE STAGES BETWEEN NOW AND 1982. AS
THE PLAN NOW STANDS, A TOTAL OF 321 IMPORT ITEMS WILL BE
DELETED FROM THE BANNED AND RESTRICTED LISTS, AND ALLOWED
FREE ENTRY--133 ITEMS WILL BE FREED EFFECTIVE MAY 1, 1978,
AN ADDITIONAL 78 DURING 1979-80 PERIOD, AND A FINAL 110 IN
1981-82. ESPECIALLY IN 1978, EMPHASIS APPEARS TO BE ON
LIBERALIZATION OF NEEDED RAW MATERIALS AND OTHER ITEMS
WHICH DO NOT POSE A SERIOUS COMPETITIVE THREAT TO
KOREAN PRODUCERS; IN PARTICULAR, THE AGRICULTURAL
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SECTOR AND KOREAN SMALL/MEDIUM INDUSTRY REMAIN HEAVILY
PROTECTED (THE ROKG PROJECTS TOTAL INCREASED IMPORTS IN
1978 AS A RESULT OF THIS LIBERALIZATION PROGRAM AT A
MODEST \$200 MILLION). FURTHERMORE, COMPENSATORY MEASURES
IN THE FORM OF HIGHER TARIFFS WILL TEND TO PREVENT A
DRAMATIC RISE IN IMPORTS, AT LEAST IN THE NEAR TERM. ON
THE OTHER HAND, A NUMBER OF THE ITEMS MARKED FOR LIBERAL-

IZATION IN 1979-82 APPEAR TO POSE A GENUINE COMPETITIVE CHALLENGE TO KOREAN INDUSTRY. AT A MINIMUM, THE PROGRAM IS AN ENCOURAGING SIGN OF KOREA'S INTENTION TO AVOID PROTECTIONIST MISTAKES AND MOVE IN THE DIRECTION OF AN EVENTUAL OPEN TRADING SYSTEM. -- END SUMMARY.

1. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE GUIDELINES SET DOWN LAST FEBRUARY 16 (REFTEL), THE KOREAN GOVERNMENT ON APRIL 15, 1978, ANNOUNCED A PROGRAM OF IMPORT LIBERALIZATION TO TAKE PLACE IN SUCCESSIVE STAGES BETWEEN NOW AND 1982. ESSENTIALLY, THE PROGRAM CONSISTS OF SHIFTING IMPORT ITEMS FROM THE "BANNED" AND "RESTRICTED" LISTS (WHEREBY IMPORTS ARE EITHER BANNED OUTRIGHT OR SUBJECT TO RESTRICTIVE PRIOR APPROVAL REQUIREMENTS) TO THE "AUTOMATIC APPROVAL" LISTS (WHEREBY ITEMS ARE FREELY IMPORTABLE TO ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, SUBJECT ONLY TO TARIFF REQUIREMENTS).

2. GENERAL MAGNITUDE OF LIBERALIZATION MEASURES: UNDER THE APRIL 15 MEASURES, A TOTAL OF 321 IMPORT ITEMS (AMOUNTING TO 227 COMPLETE 4-DIGIT CCCN COMMODITY CATEGORIES) WILL BE SHIFTED TO AUTOMATIC APPROVAL STATUS; OF THESE, 133 ITEMS WILL BE FREED EFFECTIVE MAY 1, 1978, 78 ITEMS WILL BE FREED DURING THE 1979-80 PERIOD, AND THE REMAINING 110 ITEMS WILL BE FREED DURING THE 1981-82 PERIOD. OF THE 133 ITEMS (75 COMPLETE 4-DIGIT CCCN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CATEGORIES) TO BE LIVERALIZED NEXT MONTH, 87 (47 COMPLETE 4-DIGIT CCCN CATEGORIES) WILL ENJOY FULL AUTOMATIC APPROVAL STATUS, WHILE 46 (28 4-DIGIT CCCN) WILL BE SUBJECT TO A "SURVEILLANCE" PROCEDURE. AS EXPLAINED IN REFTEL, THESE "SURVEILLANCE" ITEMS WILL BE FREELY IMPORTABLE, BUT IMPORTS WILL BE CLOSELY MONITORED TO DETERMINE THEIR IMPACT ON THE DOMESTIC MARKET. AFTER A PERIOD OF TIME, DEPENDING ON THE RESULTS, ITEMS WILL EITHER BE MOVED TO FULL AUTOMATIC APPROVAL STATUS, OR RETURNED TO THE RESTRICTED LIST.

3. THE OVERALL MAGNITUDE OF THE APRIL 15 MEASURES-- WHICH, ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT ESTIMATES, WILL INCREASE KOREA'S 1978 IMPORTS BY ABOUT \$200 MILLION--MAY BEST BE EXPRESSED IN THIS "BEFORE AND AFTER" TABLE:

RESTRICTION	NUMBER OF 4-DIGIT CCCN ITEMS				
	PREVIOUS	MAY 78	1979-80	1981-82	
BANNED	50	0	0	0	
RESTRICTED	456	431	368	279	
AUTOMATIC APPROVAL (AA)		591	666	729	818

--OF WHICH SURVEILLANCE (0((28) (UNK) (UNK)
--NEWLY ADDED AA ITEMS (-) (133) (78) (110)
--OF WHICH 4-DIGIT CCCN (-) (75) (63) (89)
TOTAL 1,097 1,097 1,097 1,097

4. THE "BANNED LIST", PER SE, WILL BE ABOLISHED ON MAY 1, 1978, AND ALL ITEMS MOVED EITHER TO THE RESTRICTED OR AA LISTS. WE UNDERSTAND, HOWEVER, THAT THIS IS LARGELY A COSMETIC CHANGE SINCE MANY OF THE ITEMS, THOUGH HENCEFORTH LISTED UNDER THE "RESTRICTED" CATEGORY, WILL REMAIN BANNED (AS ARE MANY OF THE SUB-ITEMS ON THE CURRENT RESTRICTED LIST).

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5. MAJOR ITEMS TO BE FREED ON MAY 1, 1978: A COMPLETE LIST OF THE ITEMS TO BE FREED, BY CCCN NUMBER, WILL BE RELEASED TOWARDS THE END OF MAY WHEN THE GOVERNMENT PREPARES ITS TRADE PLAN FOR THE SECOND HALF OF 1978 (THE LIST WILL BE TRANSMITTED BY AIRGRAM AT THAT TIME). ACCORDING TO INFORMATION NOW AVAILABLE, HOWEVER, THE LIST OF 133 COMMODITIES TO BE FREED IMMEDIATELY WILL INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING MAJOR ITEMS (SURVEILLANCE ITEMS INDICATED BY AMPERSANDS (&)):
PULP, RAW WOOL, &LUMBER, COFFEE BEANS, COCOA, SOFT DRINK CONCENTRATE, &BENZENE, &CRUDE BENZENE, LEATHER, INDUSTRIAL PERFUME, PIGMENT, UREA RESIN, ALKYD RESIN,

ISOPRENE RUBBER, SODIUM SULPHATE, INDUSTRIAL AMMONIUM
SULPHATE, STABILIZER FOR PCV, RED LEAD, ACTIVE CARBON
POWDER, ANTIRUSTING AGENT, &PIG IRON, BILLET, IRON
DRUMS, IRON PINS, &WOLLEN YARN, COMBINES, SPADES,
&DRILL PLANTERS, &RICE TRANSPLANTING MACHINES,
&POWER TILLERS, &ANIMAL FEED CUTTERS, &POWER
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THRESHERS, &GRAIN DRIERS, SHOVELS AND OTHER HAND
TOOLS, &TRUCKS (OVER 8 TONS), &FORK LIFTS (OVER
10 TONS), SAFETY LANTERNS FOR MINERS, FOOD PRO-
CESSING MACHINES, SPEEDOMETERS, ENVELOPE MAKING
MACHINES, COAL BRIQUETTE MANUFACTURING MACHINES,
&GLUTAMATE SODA, LAUNDRY SOAP, RUBBER TIRES (RADIAL
TIRES EXCLUDED), RUBBER HOSE, RUBBER BELT, SHOES
(EXCEPT LEATHER SHOES) AND THEIR PARTS, &FLAT GLASS,
&SAFETY GLASS, &GLASS PRODUCTS SUCH AS TABLEWARE,
&TOILETS, REFRIGERATORS (EXCEPT THOSE ABOVE 300
LITERS), ELECTRIC FANS, BLACK-WHITE TIV RECEIVERS
(EXCEPT SMALL ONES), PIANOS, ORGANS, ACCORDIONS AND
THEIR PARTS, &BREAD, &RAMYON (INSTANT NOODLE), &PIE,
&SOUP, &FRUCTOSE SIRUP (EXCEPT GRAPE-SUGAR), &PRO-
CESSED SUGAR PRODUCTS, &NOODLES AND &WAFERS AND LARD
FOR SACRAMENTS.

6. MAJOR ITEMS AMONG THE 78 TO BE FREED DURING 1979-80:
RAW SUGAR, POLYESTER RESIN, PAPER, PAPER PRODUCTS,
WASHING MACHINES FOR DOMESTIC USE, DIAL-TYPE TELE-
PHONES, AGRICULTURAL TRACTORS, POWER SPRAYERS, WATER
PUMPS, BOLTS AND NUTS, PRIMARY BATTERIES, ELECTRIC
BULBS, PRESSURE GAUGES, ELECTRIC CONDENSERS, PULP
MANUFACTURING MACHINES, PAPER PROCESSING MACHINES,
WALL CLOCKS, WIRE ROPES, VACUUM BOTTLES, ARTIFICIAL
FLOWERS, AND CHALK.

7. MAJOR ITEMS AMONG THE 110 TO BE FREED DURING 1981-82:
SOAP, PAINT, PRINTING INK, POLYPROPYLENE, POLY-
STYRENE, PCV, VCM, ELECTRIC WIRE, SEWING MACHINES
FOR HOME USE, ELECTRIC RICE COOKERS, CARGO TRUCKS,
ENGINES, BEARINGS, VALVES, ELECTRONIC CALCULATORS,
CASH REGISTERS, CARBON BRUSHES, ELECTRIC MIXERS FOR
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HOME USE, EYE GLASSES, BINOCULARS, HOT COILS, IRON
BOILERS, NOTEBOOKS, AND ALBUMS.

8. CRITERIA USED IN SELECTION OF ITEMS TO BE LIBERALIZED:
COMMENTING TO REPORTERS ON THE LIBERALIZATION PACKAGE, THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY STATED THAT TOP PRIORITY WAS GIVEN TO BASIC RAW MATERIALS. ALSO SUBJECT TO LIBERALIZATION WERE NON-LUXURY ITEMS MONOPOLIZED BY LARGE DOMESTIC FIRMS, AND OTHER ITEMS IN WHICH KOREAN PRODUCERS ARE STRONGLY COMPETITIVE. LARGELY EXEMPTED FROM LIBERALIZATION WERE: AGRICULTURAL AND FISHERY PRODUCTS; PRODUCTS MANUFACTURED BY SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED KOREAN FIRMS, WHICH CONTINUE TO RELY ON GOVERNMENT PROTECTION FROM OVERSEAS COMPETITION; AND ITEMS (SUCH AS COSMETICS AND MEDICINES) EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED BY ONE OF THE 23 "SPECIAL LAWS" COVERING A WIDE RANGE OF INDUSTRIES. IN ADDITION, CERTAIN LUXURY GOODS (THOUGH NOMINALLY SHIFTED TO THE RESTRICTED LIST) WILL REMAIN UNDER AN IMPORT BAN.

9. OTHER MEASURES TO BE TAKEN IN CONNECTION WITH THE LIBERALIZATION PROGRAM: IN ADDITION TO THE BASIC STEPS OUTLINED ABOVE, THE GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE A SERIES OF RELATED MEASURES DESIGNED TO EITHER SOFTEN OR REINFORCE THE IMPACT OF THE LIBERALIZATION PROGRAM. THEY INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

(A) AS REPORTED REFTTEL, THE TARIFF SYSTEM WILL BE REVISED TO PROVIDE A FURTHER PERIOD OF PROTECTION FOR LOCAL INDUSTRIES WHICH ARE NEWLY EXPOSED TO INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION, BUT ARE DEEMED NOT YET READY TO COMPETE ON AN EQUAL FOOTING. IN ADDITION, CONSIDERATION WILL BE GIVEN TO ADOPTING SUPPLEMENTARY MEASURES SUCH AS ANTI-DUMPING DUTIES AND "FLEXIBLE" TAX FORMULAS. THE OVERALL TARIFF REALIGNMENT WILL REPORTEDLY BE COMPLETED THIS JUNE AND SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR ITS APPROVAL IN SEPTEMBER.
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(B) THE GOVERNMENT WILL UNDERTAKE A COMPLETE REVIEW OF THE 23 SPECIAL LAWS WHICH TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER TRADE PLAN PROVISIONS AND UNDER WHICH IMPORT OF A WIDE VARIETY OF ITEMS, SUCH AS COSMETICS AND MEDICINES, REMAIN PROHIBITED. OSTENSIBLY, THE AIM WILL BE TO REDUCE IMPORT BARRIERS IN CASES WHERE CURRENT BARRIERS

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INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 COME-00 STR-07 TRSE-00
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ARE UNREASONABLY HIGH. WE WILL HAVE A BETTER IDEA OF
THE TRUE EXTENT OF THESE AMENDMENTS AFTER THEY HAVE BEEN
PREPARED (IN JUNE) AND SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
(PROBABLY IN SEPTEMBER).

(C) A NUMBER OF MEASURES WILL REPORTEDLY BE TAKEN
TO ENSURE THAT THE IMPORT LIBERALIZATION PROGRAM DOES
NOT RESULT IN A FURTHER DEEPENING OF KOREA'S TRADE
DEFICIT VIS-A-VIS JAPAN (SEE SEPTTEL). - END UNCLASSIFIED.

10. BEGIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE - COMMENT:

--WE BELIEVE THIS PROGRAM IS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN
THE RIGHT DIRECTION. IT INDICATES A SINCERE INTENTION ON THE
PART OF THE KOREAN GOVERNMENT TO AVOID PROTECTIONIST
MISTAKES AND MOVE TOWARDS AN EVENTUAL OPEN TRADING
SYSTEM AS SOON AS THE BALANCE OF PAYMENTS ALLOWS. IN
PARTICULAR, THE TECHNIQUE OF PRE-ANNOUNCING FUTURE
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LIBERALIZATION MEASURES PUTS DOMESTIC MANUFACTURERS ON
NOTICE THAT THEY WILL EVENTUALLY BE OBLIGED TO GEAR UP
FOR INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION. SOME OF THE ITEMS TO BE
LIBERALIZED IN 1979-82 APPEAR TO POSE A GENUINE CHAL-
LENGE TO DOMESTIC PRODUCERS.

--AT THE SAME TIME, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THESE

MEASURES IN THEMSELVES WILL LEAD TO A DRAMATIC INCREASE IN KOREAN IMPORTS, AT LEAST IN 1978. THE GOVERNMENT'S CLAIM OF \$200 MILLION IN INCREASED 1978 IMPORTS IS NOTABLY MODEST, AND PROBABLY REALISTIC.

--THE EMPHASIS, AT LEAST IN 1978, APPEARS TO BE ON LIBERALIZING ITEMS SUCH AS RAW MATERIALS WHICH WILL CONTRIBUTE TO INCREASED KOREAN EXPORTS. IN MANY CASES, THESE ARE ITEMS WHICH WERE ON THE RESTRICTED LIST AS A PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE BUT WERE NORMALLY ALLOWED FREE ENTRY. IN THE CASE OF CONSUMER GOODS, CERTAIN ITEMS WHICH DO NOT POSE A COMPETITIVE THREAT (E.G. SMALL REFRIGERATORS, LARGE BLACK AND WHITE TV'S) ARE BEING LIBERALIZED, WHILE COMPETITIVE ITEMS (LARGE REFRIGERATORS AND SMALL TV'S) REMAIN RESTRICTED. THE EFFECT OF THE CURRENT LIBERALIZATION MEASURES SEEMS TO BE MAINLY TO CLEAR THE BOOKS OF NONESSENTIAL IMPORT RESTRICTIONS, PARING THE RESTRICTED LIST DOWN TO HARD-CORE ITEMS THAT POSE A REAL COMPETITIVE THREAT TO KOREAN INDUSTRY. THIS HAS THE USEFUL EFFECT OF CUTTING DOWN ON UNNECESSARY PAPERWORK BUT WILL NOT NECESSARILY LEAD TO SIGNIFICANTLY GREATER IMPORTS. THE FACT THAT REACTION TO THE PROGRAM FROM TRADE GROUPS HAS BEEN LARGELY FAVORABLE MAY SUGGEST THAT NO ONE EXPECTS TO BE SERIOUSLY AFFECTED, AT LEAST IN THE NEAR TERM.

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--THE VIRTUAL EXEMPTION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS FROM THE LIBERALIZATION PROGRAM SEEMS TO REPRESENT A VICTORY FOR PROTECTIONISTS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR AND A SETBACK FOR ADVOCATES OF A MORE ECONOMICALLY RATIONAL AGRICULTURAL POLICY, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING.

--MUCH OF THE LIBERALIZING EFFECT OF REMOVING ITEMS FROM THE RESTRICTED LIST MAY BE OFFSET BY COMPENSATORY MEASURES IN THE FORM OF HIGHER TARIFFS. THE ASSUMPTION IS THAT THESE TARIFFS WILL BE REDUCED OVER TIME (ROK POLICY IS TO MOVE TO A UNITARY ROLE), BUT THE INITIAL EFFECT, IN MANY INSTANCES, WILL BE TO DISCOURAGE INCREASED IMPORTS. - END LIMITED OFFICIAL USE.

11. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED - OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED U.S. SALES: U.S. EXPORTERS SHOULD GIVE CAREFUL CONSIDERATION TO THE ABOVE LISTS OF LIBERALIZED ITEMS, AND THE MORE DETAILED LISTS TO BE MADE AVAILABLE NEXT MONTH, FOR POSSIBLE EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES. OUR QUICK REVIEW POINTS TO THE FOLLOWING AS PERHAPS THE MOST PROMISING: (A) IN 1978--TRUCKS (OVER 8 TONS), FORK LIFTS (OVER 10 TONS),

AND FOOD PROCESSING MACHINES; (B) IN 1979-80--WASHING
MACHINES FOR DOMESTIC USE, DIAL-TYPE TELEPHONES, AGRI-
CULTURAL TRACTORS, PULP MANUFACTURING MACHINES, AND PAPER
PROCESSING MACHINES; (C) IN 1981-82--SEWING MACHINES FOR
HOME USE, CARGO TRUCKS, ENGINES, CASH REGISTERS, ELECTRIC
MIXERS FOR HOME USE AND BINOCULARS. MUCH WILL DEPEND,
HOWEVER, ON THE DEGREE OF EFFORT EXPENDED BY U.S.
EXPORTERS AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF KOREAN MEASURES TO
MINIMIZE IMPORTS FROM JAPAN.
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